

them. Whether we say that moral evaluation is being “jewified or christianized or rabbleized (what do words matter!)” (*GM* I 9), what is evident is that the “slave revolt in morality” (*GM* I 10) has been victorious in permanently transforming Europeans and, through their proselytizing and colonialist efforts, increasingly transforming other populations (the qualification is necessary because Nietzsche acknowledges in *GM* I 16 that the slave revolt in morality has not yet permeated moral thinking everywhere). The depth of the victory in Europe is so complete that even “free-thinkers” who might otherwise laugh at the “crude and boorish,” even “repellent,” practices of modern Christianity still willingly stomach the “poison” of its moral values that now courses through “the whole body of humanity . . . even though its tempo and pace, from now on, might tend to be slower, softer, quieter, calmer—there is no hurry” (*GM* I 9).

Section 10

Section 10 announces that “the beginning of the slaves’ revolt in morality occurs when resentment itself turns creative and gives birth to values: the resentment of those beings who, denied their proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge” (*GM* I 10). This passage introduces one of the most distinctive features of *GM*, the psychology of resentment and its role in generating moral values. Given that it occupies a dominant position in Nietzsche’s analysis, it is more than a little disappointing that he does not define the term ‘resentment’ here, or, in fact, anywhere in *GM*, instead lifting the French word intact from Eugen Dühring’s *The Value of Life* (*Der Wert des Lebens*), from 1865. Worse, the analysis of resentment in these sections is critically inadequate. Relevant supplemental discussion occurs later in *GM* III and, elsewhere, in *HH* and *BGE*. Since it is central to the genealogical project, a close description of the psychology of resentment and its role in the creation of values is necessary.

Part of the “essence of *resentment*” is that it reverses “the evaluating glance” by focusing on the “outside world instead of [turning the glance] back onto oneself,” and that it “needs, physiologically, external

stimuli in order to act at all—its action is basically a reaction” (*GM I 10*). Knightly-aristocratic evaluation “acts and grows spontaneously” and “seeks its opposite only so that it can say ‘yes’ to itself even more thankfully and exultantly” (*GM I 10*; see also *BGE 260*: “[T]he noble kind of human being feels *itself* to be value-determining”). On the other hand, resentment is fundamentally reactive. So, at a minimum, resentment is a psychological event, process, or episode that has causal antecedents. That is hardly a surprise: all psychological events, processes, and episodes have causal antecedents. Luckily, something more interesting than that is on offer. The masters, even if unreflective, brutish, and simple, were energetic and necessarily active, engaging their drives and engaged in their lives. They were yes-saying individuals, “strong, full natures in whom there is a superabundance of a power that is flexible, regenerative, healing,” individuals who knew “not to separate action from happiness” and who could shake off with a shrug “many worms that would have burrowed deeply into others” (*GM I 10*). In comparison, the slaves were “impotent and oppressed” and “rankled with poisonous and hostile feelings” (*GM I 10*). They craved respite from their suffering, and for them happiness was a “narcotic, an anesthetic, rest, peace, ‘sabbath,’ relaxation of the mind and stretching of the limbs, in short something *passive*” (*GM I 10*).

Let us stop here. Without clarifying what the metaphors of “evaluating glance” and “saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to itself” mean and without knowing more about why the oppressed might desire anesthetizing affects, these initial descriptions of resentment are too enigmatic to reveal most of its dimensions and implications. So what follows describes resentment as a psychological event, process, or episode of a particular type that has a particular structure, feels a particular way, has particular causal antecedents and causal consequences, and is productive in certain ways.

Ressentiment’s Status as an Instinct/Drive

Nietzsche is not such a fawning admirer of the old masters as to think they were free of resentment; nor does he credit its invention to the slave revolt in morality. Resentment was already found in societies predating the slave revolt, and he acknowledges in

GM I 10 that the old masters experienced it as well. He is also careful not to claim that resentment is determined by social class, so it is not a reaction whose content consists solely in countering noble values. Resentment is instead an “instinctive reaction” (GM I 11; see also GM III 15) found in all human beings and at all times in human history. As instinctive, resentment occurs naturally as an involuntary and largely unalterable set of physiological and psychological responses to certain kinds of inputs. So too, resentment’s affective qualities—its phenomenological characters and the various emotions it prompts—are also involuntary and largely unalterable across individuals when prompted by any of that set of inputs. Those inputs and affects together cause other predictable cognitive, affective, and behavioral consequences.

Some exceptions to these generalizations may be admitted. For instance, at A 40, Nietzsche acknowledges that resentment can be brought under control and perhaps overcome (he even identifies the lesson of Jesus as being the overcoming of resentment, surprising for anyone who thinks that his disdain for Christianity extends without qualification to its spiritual touchstone). He also thinks that resentment is experienced less frequently and usually prompts different outcomes in the old masters than in the old slaves. Even if the masters experienced resentment, it did not “occur in countless cases where it is unavoidable for all who are weak and powerless,” and when the masters did feel resentment, it was “consumed and exhausted in an immediate reaction” (GM I 10), such as directly challenging the offender to a combative trial of some sort.

Resentment as found in the slaves and priests is the focus of most of Nietzsche’s attention, for as found among them, resentment reveals something that is familiar to most of us moderns (as discussed presently, resentment’s expression in the priestly caste is somewhat different). Powerlessness, poverty, ill-health, unprotected social standing, and the unique kinds of suffering they caused, together entailed that the slaves could not engage in direct retaliation against insult and injury without immediate risk of losing either life or limb or whatever meager social status they had. Since direct response was barred, they had to settle for indirect retaliation, that is, they had to “compensate” for the impossibility of direct revenge with “imaginary revenge”

(GM I 10). One part of that imaginary revenge was the revolution that resulted in the revaluation of the masters' values.

Describing ressentiment as natural is but one of several descriptions of ancient individuals that emphasize what is natural in them. Consider:

There is nothing strange about the fact that lambs bear a grudge towards large birds of prey: but that is no reason to blame the large birds of prey for carrying off little lambs. . . . It is just as absurd to ask strength *not* to express itself as strength, *not* to be a desire to overthrow, crush, become master, to be a thirst for enemies, resistance and triumphs, as it is to ask weakness to express itself as strength. (GM I 13)

If this general point is correct, it follows as a corollary that the masters were strong simply because they took physical actions against enemies and had desires to dominate others, to overthrow and crush them, while the slaves were weak simply because they refrained from physical combat and submissively accepted the masters' contempt for them. They may have tried to overthrow and crush enemies, and they may have tried revenge, but their weakness ruled out successful retaliation.

The masters behaved rather differently when they left the confines of society and went on adventures or on raids against other communities and tribes:

[T]hey *return* to the innocent conscience of the wild beast, as exultant monsters, who perhaps go away having committed a hideous succession of murder, arson, rape and torture, in a mood of bravado and spiritual equilibrium as though they had simply played a student's prank, convinced that poets will now have something to sing about and celebrate for quite some time. At the center of all these noble races we cannot fail to see the beast of prey, the magnificent *blond beast* avidly prowling round for spoil and victory; this hidden center needs release from time to time, the beast must get out again, must return to the wild: —Roman, Arabian, Germanic, Japanese nobility, Homeric heroes, Scandinavian Vikings—in this requirement they are all alike. (GM I 11)

It cannot be denied that Nietzsche thinks highly of the masters and their “scorn for safety, body, life, comfort, their shocking cheerfulness and depth of delight in all destruction, in all the debauches of victory and cruelty” (*GM I 11*). So this passage might be taken to suggest that noble types of all ages and in all sociocultural contexts are justified in being as detached and blasé about their condescension and contempt of others as the masters were when they went on their campaigns of “murder, arson, rape and torture.” Yet, despite the masters’ obvious power, unthinking nonchalance, and wanton destruction, Nietzsche recognizes that from our modern perspective, they are “monsters,” “shockingly violent,” and “not much better than uncaged beasts of prey,” with “hideous” behaviors that are “cold, cruel, lacking feeling and conscience, crushing everything and coating it with blood” (*GM I 11*). They were, after all, tribal barbarians, strong and brave but “mad, absurd and sudden” (*GM I 11*; see also *BGE 257*: “the noble caste always started out as the barbarian caste”). The only role the masters can play for us now is that they give an ancient example of a kind of human being that was impressive in its time. Other, modern examples of a “human being who justifies the human being, a stroke of luck, an instance of someone who makes up for and redeems the human being and enables us to retain our *faith in humankind*” (*GM I 12*) are now needed. (Note also that the list of old masters includes Romans, Arabians, and Japanese. None are blond Teutons. So the suspicion that membership in any noble class is reserved to Germans is again shown to be false.)

Ressentiment's Affective Character

Ressentiment erupts in our inner world as a combination of strong feelings including “agitation” (*GM I 10*), “pain” (*GM III 15*), “suffering” (*GM III 15, 17*), “misery” (*GM I 14*), “hatred” (*GM I 10, 11, 14, 16*), “hostility” (*GM I 10*), “vindictiveness” (*GM I 13*), “vengeful desires” (*GM I 10, 11, 14, III 14, 15*), “envy” (*GM II 1, III 15*), and “spite” (*GM III 15*). Note that this list segregates a set of affects that are caused by inputs but lack something or someone toward which they are directed (agitation, pain, suffering, misery) from a set of affects that are caused by inputs and have something or someone toward which they are directed (hatred, hostility, vindictiveness, vengeance, envy,

and spite). Segregating the kinds of affect associated with resentment thus exposes it as a temporally extended and multifaceted psychological episode rather than a short-lived and unidimensional event or state. Resentment is initially experienced as an immediate, involuntary, and distressing reaction to certain kinds of currently unidentified inputs. Yet, in subsequent phases, it is a reaction complicated by other elements that load this direct and spontaneous distress with other recruited affective and cognitive dimensions and elements.

Compare resentment with defensive counters. Resentment is distinct from a “defensive return of a blow, a purely protective reaction, a ‘reflex movement’ in the case of any sudden injury or peril, such as that performed even by a headless frog to ward off corrosive acid” (*GM III 15*). Such behaviors are distinct from resentment because they reflexively prevent “further harm from being done” (*GM III 15*). Inanimate objects, plants, or nonhuman animals typically cause such defensive counters. Yet, even if another person injures us, we sometimes similarly act out of this kind of “self-preservation,” and in doing so, we are thinking “not of the person who caused the injury, but only of oneself: we act thus *without* wanting to do harm in return, but only so as *to get out* with life and limb” (*HH II Wanderer 33*).

Nietzsche is not certain that defensive counterblows count as a form of revenge, but even if they do, they must be distinguished from a second kind of revenge. One distinctive feature of this second kind is that we “transfer [our] thoughts from [our self] to [our] opponent” and reflect “over the other’s vulnerability and capacity for suffering: [we] want to hurt” (*HH II Wanderer 33*). Instead of preventing further pain with a defensive counterblow, the desire to cause suffering in others recruits other beliefs and affective states so as to displace or transfer our suffering onto another who is held causally responsible for it, thereby anesthetizing it. This more complex kind of revenge is characteristic of resentment. Resentment successfully anesthetizes suffering by redirecting sufferers away from the “true reason” (*GM III 15*) for their pain and onto some other cause for it. That fabricated cause is the “first available pretext. . . . ‘Someone or other must be to blame’—this kind of conclusion is peculiar to all sick people” (*GM III 15*).

Resentment’s anesthetizing affects are investigated presently. Here we note three facets of suffering on which Nietzsche relies. First,

suffering is ubiquitous to life; it may be something we would love to ignore or paper over, perhaps even abolish (*BGE* 44), but it always remains. To try to abolish suffering would be to abolish life itself (*BGE* 44, 202, 225, 257; *EH* “Good Books” Z 8). Second, it is experientially axiomatic that suffering results in attempts to reduce it, and quickly (we will see in Chapter 5 that Nietzsche qualifies this categorical claim). Third, to curb it, the sufferer tries to self-diagnose its causes so as to avoid, defuse, or take vengeance against those causes. All of those who suffer have a causal drive (*Ursachentrieb*) for finding “a reason why we are in the particular state we are in—why we are feeling good or bad” (*TI* “The Four Great Errors,” 4). The act of “familiarizing something unfamiliar is comforting, reassuring, satisfying, and produces a feeling of power as well” whereas “unfamiliar things are dangerous, anxiety-provoking, upsetting” (*TI* “The Four Great Errors” 5). The ways that resentment redirects and misdirects the sufferer, and the anesthetizing affects that it elicits, are key to unlocking its unique place in Nietzsche’s psychological views of the slaves and priests and his explanation of their revolt against noble evaluation.

Ressentiment’s Inputs

‘Ressentiment’ is composed of the French *sentiment* (feeling) prefixed by *re-* (again). So resentment is a temporally extended process that re-presents a feeling that was prompted by something in the past and now recalled in memory. The prompts for feelings recalled in resentment vary enormously, ranging from the purely physiological to the physiopsychological, to the more recognizably psychological, and, finally, to the psychosocial and social. At the physiological end of the spectrum are some quite specific causes, including “a disease of the *nervus sympaticus*, or an excessive secretion of bile, or a deficiency of potassium sulphate and phosphate in the blood, or abdominal strictures interrupting the blood circulation, or a degeneration of the ovaries and such like” (*GM* III 15). Other physiological causes include having bowel complaints and neurasthenia (*GM* I 6), a bad diet (*GM* III 17), practicing sexual abstinence and fasting (*GM* I 6), and malaria, syphilis, or other diseases (*GM* III 17). More frequently, general physiological conditions, disorders, ailments, and deficiencies are identified. So, for example, being filthy (*GM* I 6), weak (*GM* I 13, 14),

impotent (*GM I 7, 10, 13, 14*), diseased, ill, and subject to inner disintegration (*GM I 6, 11, III 15, 16*), sick, upset, and leaden (*GM III 16*), obstructed, weary, and lethargic (*GM III 17; BGE 260*), and stunted, wasted, and poisoned (*GM I 11*) are all possible physiological causes of resentment.

Causes of resentment that straddle the physiological-psychological line include being failed, tired, and exhausted (*GM I 11*), mediocre and unedifying (*GM I 11*), cowardly (*GM I 5, 13, 14*), and timid and submissive (*GM I 13, 14*). Causes more plausibly characterized as psychological include suffering from ‘psychic’ disorders (*GM III 16*), and deep depression, heaviness, and black melancholy (*GM III 17*). And, finally, the psychosocial and social causes of resentment that Nietzsche focuses most on—they are the causes most tightly bound up in the slave revolt in morality—include being poor, powerless, and deprived (*GM I 7; BGE 260*), ugly (*GM I 7*), unhappy and pitiable (*GM I 10*), a slave worker and beast of burden (*GM I 10*), oppressed (*GM I 10, 13; BGE 260*), worm-eaten (*GM I 10*), downtrodden (*GM I 11, 13*), and ill-treated and violated (*GM I 11, 13; BGE 260*).

One thing that is immediately apparent is that resentment is a response fed by entirely natural “condition[s] of existence” (*GM I 10*) rather than otherworldly causes. It is important to re-emphasize here how thoroughgoing Nietzsche’s naturalism is. That he commits himself to a naturalistic explanation of moral evaluation has already been established. Still, even if some of the causes of resentment are natural, there is no inconsistency in thinking that others might be otherworldly. However, Nietzsche rejects this mixed view. For him, all inputs to resentment are natural inputs and none are otherwise. Of course, persons experiencing resentment may believe that the cause of their resentment is an insult shown to God, but all that shows is that there is a difference between what people believe about resentment’s causes and what those causes actually are, which in turn reveals that those who experience resentment are subject to self-deception.

The Cauldron of Resentment

Any one of the previously identified causal inputs, or any combination of them, can feed the cauldron of resentment, where they then mix with other affects, emotions, drives, desires, and beliefs about

oneself and others. Recall that when felt, resentment in the old masters was immediately discharged in some trial of combat or display of courage and bravery. So even if it shares some of the same causes as those found in the slaves and priests, resentment in the masters resolved quickly and violently and did not persist long enough to recruit or mix much with other beliefs, affects, drives, and desires. However, deprived as they were of immediate physical opportunities to discharge their suffering, the stew of resentment in slaves and priests continued to churn, and to it other ingredients were added, making it more ruminative, more provocative and poisonous, more creative and imaginative.

Physiological causes are often easy to diagnose and, having once been diagnosed, they typically do not result in further reflection and so typically do not result in any kind of desire for revenge. Of course, if we smash a thumb with a hammer, we may curse the hammer and hurl it as far from us as possible. Similarly, when another person inadvertently elbows us in the ribs on the subway, we may shove the person's arm away. Both are protective counterblows to prevent further injury and do not include any desire to cause harm to anything or anyone else. We may also take our frustrations out on inanimate objects when we do something stupid, embarrassing, or clumsy. Tennis players sometimes smash their racket on the ground when they make a bad shot. In these and many other similar cases, desire to cause harm to inanimate objects exists even though we know that they do not feel pain and do not suffer. None are examples of resentment.

Most physiological, psychological, and social suffering is more involved than stubbing a toe or kicking a flat tire. To begin with, these knottier kinds of suffering may be difficult to diagnose because their causes are epistemologically opaque. We who suffer may not know enough to correctly self-diagnose debilitating headaches caused by brain cancer; we may be ignorant of the causal connections between eating sugar, cavity production, and toothache; we may be unconscious of some facial tic but be painfully aware that others find being in our presence unsettling; we may be blind to our own psychological shortcomings or self-deceived about our own character and yet may suffer from them on a daily basis; we may not be aware of the macro-economic causes of economic oppression even while being dreadfully

cognizant of our poverty and subjugation. In addition, many kinds of psychological and social suffering are difficult to neutralize even if their causes are known, either because those causes are unavoidable, or because they are recurring, or because they are uniquely salient, or because their resolution is so challenging.

Yet the need to diagnose suffering's causes continues even when we cannot identify them, and the need to end suffering remains salient even when we cannot see how to accomplish it. In these cases, those needs can recruit other affects, emotions, drives, and beliefs to discover or invent new causes of suffering and to conceive novel resolutions for it based on those discoveries and inventions. Here the creative productivity characteristic of resentment starts to express itself. Since we are all amateur sleuths of our own suffering, we continue to look for "a cause of distress; more exactly, for a culprit, even more precisely for a *guilty* culprit who is receptive to distress, —in short, for a living being upon whom [w]e can release . . . emotions, actually or in effigy, on some pretext or other" (*GM* III 15). This key passage contains four distinct claims. First, when we cannot easily find a cause for our distress, we often look for another animate being, usually another human being, to be a culprit of our misfortune. Second, other humans are culprits of our suffering because they are thought to be causally responsible for it. Third, since other humans are relevantly similar to us, culprits also feel pain and suffer. Fourth, we can release or transfer our suffering onto culprits, whether actually or indirectly "in effigy."

Especially when suffering is caused by weakness or impotence, we are prone to reidentifying the cause of our suffering as being some other person rather than some internal, social, or environmental condition. Having thus identified, or rather misidentified, a person as causally responsible, we seek to displace our suffering onto that person as a way of resolving it. This need to transfer or displace suffering onto a culprit who is believed to be causally responsible is a hallmark of resentment: resentment is a strong emotion that routinely attributes or misattributes blame to another in an attempt to deaden or at least muffle our ongoing distress. And one of the most astonishing features of our desire for revenge is that its narcotizing effect can be successful even if displacing suffering onto the newly minted object of our resentment, the culprit, is unsuccessful:

[T]he release of emotions is the greatest attempt at relief, or should I say, at *anaesthetizing* on the part of the sufferer, his involuntarily longed-for narcotic against pain of any kind. In my judgment, we find here the actual physiological causation of *ressentiment*, revenge and their ilk, in a yearning, then, to *anaesthetize pain through emotion* . . . [T]he attempt is made to *anaesthetize* a tormenting, secret pain that is becoming unbearable with a more violent emotion of any sort, and at least rid the consciousness of it for the moment, — for this, one needs an emotion, the wildest possible emotion and, in order to arouse it, the first available pretext. “Someone or other must be to blame that I fell ill”—this kind of conclusion is peculiar to all sick people, and in fact becomes more insistent, the more they remain in ignorance of the true reason, the physiological one, why they feel ill. (GM III 15)

Granted, this is a gloomy psychological picture, but it is no less true for its bleakness. We can all identify episodes when we have tried to displace our frustration or anger with our own inadequacies onto others to avoid confronting them in ourselves.

Ressentiment's Productivity

Ressentiment's mixture of multifactored suffering, ignorance, self-deception, causal re- and misidentification, culprit invention, blame-throwing, and desire for revenge diverts attention away from distress that can otherwise feel intractable and redirects attention and suffering onto culprits who bear the brunt of our offloading attempts. Of course, the anesthetizing offloading of suffering onto others that resentment triggers takes many forms, most of them stupid but some of them scheming, explosive, or grotesque. One of the shrewdest and most fantastic is the slave revolt in moral evaluation.

Hatred, hostility, and the desire for revenge are among resentment's most fertile elements; they are certainly the elements to which Nietzsche most frequently attends. As we have seen, among the old masters, hatred and the desire for revenge were immediately expressed, directly and unmistakably aimed at an enemy, actively pursued until victory or defeat, and viscerally realized in tangible action. However, the more interesting case is hatred and the desire for revenge as found

among slaves and priests, in whom they grow to uncanny proportions, not immediately but gradually, not directly and unmistakably but circuitously and deviously, not actively but passively, not viscerally and tangibly but deliberately and spiritually. These oblique, reactive, cunning, and otherworldly responses provide the genealogist with some of the most thought-provoking responses to distress and misery.

Festering resentment becomes creative in one way when causal responsibility for suffering is directed away from its actual cause onto a different object, a culprit who, like the sufferer, is also liable to pain and distress. This “release of emotions is the greatest attempt at relief, or should I say, at *anaesthetizing* on the part of the sufferer, his involuntary longed-for narcotic against pain of any kind. In my judgment, we find here the actual physiological causation of *resentment*, revenge and their ilk, in a yearning, then, to *anaesthetize pain through emotion*” (GM III 15). First, instead of identifying causal responsibility for suffering as something internal, we reidentify that cause as something external. Second, we bury the real causes of suffering and create human culprits on whom we can aim our hatred and focus our revenge. Third, the fabrication of a new target of resentment underwrites an imaginary reaction rather than direct action against that target.

The slaves witnessed the old masters’ oppression regularly and their indifference daily, but the masters nonchalantly excused the suffering they caused and their indifference to it on the grounds that “the poets will now have something to sing about and celebrate” (GM I 11). Even when, as was also the case, the masters were not causally responsible for their suffering, the oppressed nonetheless reallocated responsibility to them, and in their attempt to do so they explored the nature of the culprits they identified, trying to isolate what about them might explain their oppression and indifference. At this juncture the priest’s “far-sighted, subterranean revenge, which unfolds itself slowly and thinks ahead” (GM I 8) started to assert itself. Steeped in purity rituals that helped cultivate emotional regulation and attention diversion by performing rote motor behaviors loaded with significance, the priests were familiar with methods for cultivating self-control. Since they were members of an elite class, the priests occupied a unique position. They served their own ambitions for power by organizing the suffering found everywhere around them, and they galvanized resentment by